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 TAGS: [PREL](#) [ER](#) [SU](#)
 SUBJECT: ERITREA AND SOUTH SUDAN

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald K. McMullen for reason 1.4 (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Sudanese VP and SPLM chairman Salva Kiir, accompanied by top Southern officials, concluded a two-day visit to Eritrea September 15. President Isaias, reportedly worried that the SPLM lacks strategy and cohesion, fears that Sudan could tip into chaos in the context of the upcoming election and referendum. Isaias encouraged Salva Kiir and the SPLM to prepare and implement a sound strategy, warning that time is short, according to a Sudanese source. Khartoum purportedly tried to prevent Kiir and company from visiting Asmara, but the SPLM chartered a plane and traveled from Juba via Nairobi. SPLM delegates, including Pagan Amum and Malik Agar, were pessimistic, this source continued, and agreed that:

- Darfur will "percolate" but cannot be solved in isolation from the greater Sudan political dynamic;
- War is very likely to come to the South again, either before the referendum or after, as the National Congress Party (NC) wants to control all of Sudan's oil wealth;
- the NCP will rile the southern tribal militias and attempt to create turmoil in the South;
- the South is likely to secede, and if it does, the North will become further destabilized.
- If Salva Kiir were to die suddenly, SPLM procedures indicate Riak Machar would succeed him, but Machar is seen as a Nuer corrupted by the NCP and most of the SPLA leadership is Dinka.

End Summary.

12. (C) A WARM WELCOME IN ASMARA

 Dr. Taisier Ali, the pro-SPLM ethnic Nubian and Canadian citizen who runs the Peacebuilding Center for the Horn of Africa, provided an outbrief to the ambassador following the Salva Kiir visit. Dr. Ali met with at least six of the senior SPLM members accompanying Salva Kiir. They said the visit was surprisingly cordial and typically frank. Relations had chilled in recent months due to a public scolding Isaias gave the SPLM for being inept. Isaias strongly urged the SPLM to get its act together or Sudan will

face chaos during the election and referendum. After a dinner at the presidential hall September 14, Isaias suggested the group "get some exercise," and led the surprised SPLM delegation for a lengthy walk down Asmara's main street to a bar, where they popped in for several rounds of postprandial drinks. "We couldn't even do that in Juba," one visitor said.

13. (C) PESSIMISM AMONG SPLM MEMBERS

SPLM officials asked Dr. Ali for his analysis of the Sudanese situation. After he elaborated the main points (the first four bullets of the summary), the SPLM officials said they agreed entirely, and pressed Dr. Ali to come to Juba to help craft a strategy for the SPLM. He refused. In another conversation, the SPLM officials voiced their concern that should the NCP assassinate Salva Kiir, Riak Machar would succeed him, in keeping with party regulations. Machar is seen as corrupt and in cahoots with rich NCP members. Further, as he is an ethnic Nuer, his leadership of the party would not sit well with the SPLA, which is dominated by Dinka officers, Ali related. Ali lamented that the SPLM has not provided good governance or development to the South and does not even have well-conceived policies on many of the most fundamental questions facing the South in the coming two years.

14. (C) THE ODD LINK BETWEEN ERITREA AND THE SOUTH

In 1994, when Isaias' relations with Khartoum were frosty and the SPLA was in full retreat across the South, Eritrea sent a substantial number of advisors and fighters - crews for tanks and other armored vehicles in particular - that helped prevent the SPLA's collapse. The SPLA leadership remembers fondly this Eritrean support in "their darkest hour."

Afterwards, the late John Garang often visited Asmara for weeks on end, working in seclusion on strategy and policies. According to Dr. Ali ("and Pagan knows this too"), Garang and Isaias had a secret agreement. Once the SPLM signed the CPA and went to Khartoum, if the NCP moved against the SPLM leaders, Eritrea would attack and "attempt to be in Khartoum within 24 hours." Thus, John Garang's SPLM purportedly saw the Isaias regime as its last-ditch balance against NCP treachery. Of course, as events played out, Eritrea was unable to intervene to save Garang (here the fatal helicopter crash is not viewed as accidental). Today Eritrea is dependant on Sudan for all its petroleum supplies, so is unlikely to do anything that would provoke a border closure.

15. (SBU) This message has been coordinated with Embassy Khartoum, which comments that a number of the SPLM complaints about NCP perfidy vis-a-vis the South are standard talking points.

MCMULLEN